

THE THREE HUNDRED.

A Southern Story of the War.

Three hundred men of remarkable size remained as the bulwark of a cause. Three hundred rifles flashed in the sunlight, and three hundred glistening bayonets pointed with ominous portent to the sky, which was blue. The uniform of the soldiers was gray. They were drawn up for review. There were several peculiarities that distinguished these men from ordinary soldiers in time of war. Their uniforms were bright and new. Three rows of brass buttons ornamented the breast, gold braid in graceful festoon-designs relieved the front, and a stripe of black ran down the outer seam of the trousers. The caps were surrounded by a black-and-gold band and surmounted by a cockade of white feathers. These facts are worth of note, for the reason that the war was drawing to a close. The soldiers exhibited no signs of fatigue or hardships; their uniforms were not soiled nor ragged, nor slashed by sabres, nor torn by minie-balls.

Let us examine the reasons why this magnificently equipped and excellently drilled battalion was absent from Shiloh, from Seven Pines, from Chickamauga, from Donaldson. Was the Southern army surfeited with men? No. These were of a strange and unusual type. There was not a man who wore a beard. Their faces were rosy and white. Their most striking peculiarity was their size. They were not giants. They were narrow in the shoulders, narrow in the hips, and had legs of disproportionate length. In fact, they appeared to be dwarfs.

Not less remarkable in appearance than the soldiers were those who participated in the review. There was a notable exception in the person of the colonel, who was about forty years of age, of medium stature, straight as an arrow and proud as a king. He had gray eyes that were sharp, quick, intense. His forehead was broad and massive, his hair very gray, his neck powerful and firm. He was every inch a soldier—brave, resolute, daring, calm, prompt. It was upon his companions that the caricaturist could have flung the filthiest ink of bad humor. There were six of these. They were mounted, sat their horses awkwardly and uneasily, were uncouth and ridiculous. One had extremely long legs and large ears; another was so near-sighted that the phalanx appeared to him to be a monstrous pin-cushion, pricked by many needles. Under ordinary circumstances they might have been dignified men; but their surroundings were extraordinary, and they were consequently undignified.

After the review, the colonel asked one of the gentlemen: "How do you like their appearance?"

"Very much; very much."

"Do you think they will stand?"

"Under your leadership they certainly will, commandant."

The colonel smiled.

"But, commandant," continued the gentleman, "you must remember that it is only at your earnest solicitation that I consented for the little fellows to retain their uniforms and be under fire. I would not have a hair of their beards harmed for all the world."

It was strange that he should speak thus of soldiers!

"I assure you they will be perfectly safe, sir," replied the officer.

"Quite sure?"

"Yes."

"Very well."

"The breastworks will afford ample protection. There will be merely a skirmish. The enemy will not fire upon us; but, on a mock show of resistance, will probably aim high and discharge a round to frighten us. I will return the fire in like manner, and then send up the white flag. I am extremely anxious that the boys should smell burnt powder. It will be a harmless lesson; yet I will lead them to believe I am in earnest. Of course it would be folly to oppose five thousand veterans with three hundred school-boys, twelve or thirteen years old."

They were not soldiers, then, but babes, whom the conscript act had disinclined to send to the front. They were cadets; they attended a university; the colonel was the commandant; the horsemen, the Faculty. The boys were under the age of fourteen; the professors, over the age of fifty. They were not bomb-proof, but age-proof.

The commandant mounted his horse, spurred down to the centre of the line, and made the following address:

"Men and soldiers!"

Three hundred young hearts throbbed with pride.

"The enemy is upon us. Sherman is marching to the sea. He leaves in his desolate track chimneys without houses, children without homes, a people without a God!"

He paused. The line trembled.

"You hear his guns. You see the black smoke of burning homes. In less than an hour a brigade of five thousand trained soldiers will sweep down upon you. The South does not despair. She has yet three hundred brave hearts to sacrifice upon the altar of Right."

The line swayed with excitement.

"Your mothers and sisters watch you from afar. Their prayers are with you."

He shook with emotion.

"Richmond has her eyes upon you! If we die, it is the death of the soldier."

He raised his sword:

"If we fall, our dead bodies will be a monument to honor, the inalienable birthright of a Southerner!"

This ingenuous and eloquent appeal had a wonderful effect. The colors were unfurled, and the entire line, in the wildest enthusiasm, sent up cheer after cheer. What if the boys were beguiled with a taste of glory? It made them soldiers, men, heroes.

The University was a mile from the town. A fence inclosed the broad campus. Along one side ran the public highway. On the side nearest the town was a large meadow. Not many rods from that side of the inclosure nearest the town was a trench two hundred yards long, protected by an earthenwork that rose three feet above the surrounding level. The town was separated from the University by an intervening country, crossed and checked with fences, hedges, and walls of stone, the road cutting a broad passage through the whole. On either side was a row of stately dwellings and magnificent lines of cedar and live-oak, with occasional bedges of arbor-vite, Osage orange, or Cherokee rose.

The three hundred were drawn up in line of battle some two hundred yards in advance of the intrenchment. It was the intention of the commandant to fall back after the first fire. He speculated considerably on the nature of the attack. It was uncertain whether the raiders would send out a small detachment, or precipitate the whole column upon the feeble opposition of the boys.

But the commandant had not acted in consonance with his original intentions. He did not place the boys under the protection of the breastwork; they stood upon the open plain.

A cloud of dust was seen in the direction of the town. It was caused by the rapid approach of a company of horsemen. They numbered some seventy men. The heart of the commandant beat rapidly; a crisis was at hand. The advancing cavalrymen reached the meadow and halted. They formed. A command was given; a charge was ordered. The horsemen plied the spur, and bore down, headlong and furious, upon the three hundred.

The commandant saw at a glance their terrible object: they would not shed the blood of the boys, but they would scatter them like chaff, and perhaps trample them in the dust. It was an anxious moment, and the commandant formed a resolution.

"Aim low!" he commanded.

He could not brook the insult.

"Fire!"

There was a terrific crash. When within fifty yards of the young rebels the impetuous charge of the cavalrymen was stopped by a wall of lead. It struck them in the face and blinded them; it crushed their breasts; it shattered their arms. It struck down their horses, some falling to the ground, others, rearing and plunging, fled riderless from the bloody scene. The company was overwhelmed with consternation. A pompous little array of mock soldiers had poured out from three hundred toy rifles an unmerciful hail of death, that scorched the air and tore through the vitals of the veterans.

The soldiers had not fired a gun. They did not retreat—they ran. Death stalked, unexpected, into their midst. They left a third of their number dead or wounded upon the field. But they were by no means defeated. It was now a point of honor. They rallied and prepared for a second charge.

The feelings that thrilled the breasts of the three hundred at this first taste of victory, the wild energy that sent the hot young blood bounding with redoubled speed through their veins, are things that scoff at portrayal. The faces that were white when the finger pressed the trigger were now glowing with feverish excitement. They stood as firm as a rock, and reloaded their rifles. The commandant praised them.

The cavalrymen advanced and delivered a fire at long range. One little fellow was struck in the breast. He threw up his hands and fell flat upon his face. Those in his immediate vicinity were demoralized, but the commandant galloped to the spot and reassured them. Much as it galled his pride, he saw the advisability of ordering an immediate retreat. He carried a heavy responsibility in the little life that had already gone out. He proceeded to retreat, orderly and slowly, and reserved his fire. He was in despair. Events had taken an altogether unexpected turn. He concluded to surrender. He pulled something white from his pocket, and reached down for a gun from which to wave it.

At that moment his plume fell to the ground, severed by a bullet. He had become a target. In another second a mad ball tore blindly through his heart.

When the commandant fell there was indeed dismay in the ranks. His horse bounded away. The cavalrymen, seeing his fall, again put spur to horse and charged furiously.

But the boys were not without a leader. The senior captain sprang forward, sword in hand, and placed himself in front of the commandant's body. The hat of the latter had fallen; the boy picked it up and placed it upon his own head. It was too large for him. He was a mere child, but his eyes glared dangerously. He raised his sword as the commandant had done, and assumed command. But the line was giving way. It melted. It was lost. Not to be outdone in bravery, the other captains rallied around their commander. Many were fleeing, but they also returned. The little captain bravely endeavored to form his men, but it was useless. The horsemen were charging them and were quite near. The boy captain shouted at the top of his voice:

"Fire—low!"

Again was the enemy brought to a stand by a short nervous fire, that did little harm. The boys were huddled together like frightened sheep. The commander ordered a retreat to the intrenchment.

He picked up the dead body of his commandant. By a powerful effort he succeeded in placing it across his shoulder. A torrent of warm blood gushed from the ghastly hole in the side and streamed down the boy's breast. It sickened him. The weight of the body was crushing him. He staggered forward a few steps. The odor of the blood invaded his nostrils. He closed his teeth firmly together, and struggled to retain his balance. The body was heavy and unwieldy. The legs swung from side to side and hindered him. He trembled with the exertion. His stomach revolted at the smell of blood. He surged to one side and fell, the body lying across his back. He raised himself upon his hands and knees, and the body rolled upon the ground. He grasped it by the collar, and mustering all his strength, dragged it across the intervening space, and over the embankment.

In the meantime, a cloud of dust far greater than that previously created by the repulsed horsemen was approaching the battle-field from the town. A regiment of eight hundred horse had been dispatched at the moment the firing was heard. It arrived at a most unseasonable time. The Federal company was stung with anger and shame. It had demoralized the enemy, but only temporarily; for he was now safely lodged behind an efficient shelter. The company was compelled to submit to the mortification of a reinforcement. Eight hundred and fifty cavalrymen were now arrayed against three hundred trembling boys.

The solitary figure of a boy stood calmly upon the embankment, in full view of the enemy. He was the leader of the rebel forces. The great mantle of a sorrowful loneliness enveloped him; the sad essence of that oppressing absence of everything but pride pervaded his bearing; he seemed utterly desolate and deserted, but brave, superior, scornful of death. There is not a mother in the world whose heart would not have gone out to that lonely child standing

in the shadow of death. She would have clasped him in her arms, and covered his sad, childish face with kisses. His arms were folded. His right hand clasped a sword larger than the one he had previously carried. It was the commandant's. The boy was pale.

He had restored order and confidence. The boys had as yet imbibed no idea of defeat. They were quietly secreted in the trench, rifle in hand, and prepared for another charge.

The storm gathered. A dense blue cloud, charged with a thousand thunderbolts, prepared to burst upon the heads of the three hundred. It advanced, and disgorged a hail of leaden stones. It thundered out destruction, and belched fire and smoke. It rolled onward, hurling death through the air.

The cool commander of the rebels stood upon the embankment unharmed, while the minie-balls rained around him. They threw dirt upon him as they struck the embankment. As the cloud rumbled noisily and thundering over the ground, he seized his opportunity, and shouted at the top of his voice:

"Ready—aim low—fire!"

There was a puff of smoke from the earthwork; a few in the lines of the enemy wavered; but the cloud swept on.

The crisis came. The cloud had become a flood, which poured over the embankment. The boys were scattered to the winds.

All but one. He stood pale and resolute beside the dead body of the commandant. The flood roared and seethed around him; he held the great sword in both hands, to battle with the waves.

A captain approached him and demanded:

"Surrender!"

The boy regarded him scornfully, and grasped the sword more firmly. The captain thought to frighten him by raising his sword as if to strike.

"Surrender!" he repeated.

"Not to you, sir."

The captain was astonished.

"To whom, then?"

"Your colonel."

"My colonel!"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I demand it."

"For what reason?"

"It is a courtesy due to my rank."

"Who are you?"

"A soldier."

"Your rank?"

"Colonel-commanding."

"And the man lying there?"

The boy gazed down into the upturned face. His breast was seen to heave.

"Who is he?" asked the officer softly.

A tear trembled upon the pale cheek of the boy. Less firmly he answered:

"My father."

OAKLAND, January 4, 1882.

W. C. MORROW.

A propos of the recent seventieth birthday of Oliver Wendell Holmes, an inspector of the Holmes mansion writes: "But inside, the controlling character is shown at once. Family portraits line the hall; 'claw-footed chairs and black mahogany tables and bevel-edged mirrors and stately upright cabinets' (things the Autocrat furnished his 'man of family' in describing him at his first public breakfast) fill the parlors. The portraits include the ancestral member of the council, by Simbert, and, in the Autocrat's own catalogue, 'the great merchant-uncle, by Copley, full length, sitting in his arm-chair, in a velvet cap and flowered robe, with a globe by him to show the range of his commercial transactions, and letters with large red seals lying around, one directed conspicuously to The Honorable, etc., etc. Great-grandmother, by the same artist, brown satin, lace very fine, hands superlative, grand old lady, stiffish, but imposing. 'A pair of Stuarts, and so through the list. In short, when the Autocrat gave the world his idea of a man of family, he gave a very picture of himself. His library and study is up one flight of stairs, and with spacious bay-windows looks out on the bay. From these windows—overhanging the bay—with his glass, the Doctor has a sweeping view of Beacon Hill, North Boston, Charleston, Somerville, Bunker Hill, Cambridgeport, Old Cambridge, Brookline, Brighton, Mount Auburn, Watertown, Waltham, and Arlington Heights; and winding down from the bills, the sinuous valley of the Charles. In this lofty study, with this airy outlook, our poet and philosopher is as completely isolated from the world as a hermit, and yet looks out into it on every side. He is like a watchman on the wall, who sees the signs and wonders without, and the commotion of the people within."

A correspondent writes from Leipsic that a society composed of fashionable women has been formed there with a view to discouraging extravagance of dress and any and all superfluous expenditure for adornment or display. The members are pledged not to wear jewels, false hair, trains, double skirts, or anything not required by considerations of decency and self-respect. Patterns of single gowns with very little trimming have been devised, and certain mantua-makers have agreed to follow those patterns rigorously whenever they are asked to. The members are persuaded that they will be able to work a thorough reform, and do great good by causing rules of economy to be widely adopted in that city. As many of them are rich and of high social position, they think that their influence will be felt and their example followed throughout Bavaria. We hope that they may be, justified in their opinion, but we have shuddering doubts. Something of the sort has taken place in an Ohio town, though there the motive is theologic. A number of young women have organized themselves into a Circle of the Sanctified, as they designate it, and have discarded gems and garniture of every kind. Recently one of them was found in the street in the early morning in her nightgown, and not long after in a still worse state of wardrobe. She was arrested, properly drapped, and pronounced insane. My she is so. When young women, or even tolerable ones, have discarded ornament or surrendered to the world, there is good reason to question their me-